

The Athenian Mercury.

Saturday, October 26. 1695.

Quest. 1. I beg leave to ask your advice in a matter which is too hard for me, and whereon depends all my future happiness. 'Tis this, There is a Gentleman who pretends a great kindness to me, and has made many protestations that he'll marry me when an old woman is dead, who he expects should make him her heir, but says he is fearful she will never give her consent for him to marry one that is so unequal to him as to Fortune. He would have had me break a piece of silver with him as a token of Fidelity, but was not free that any Friend of mine should be by, as a witness. If I should consent to this, I doubt he would expect some greater Favour than I should be willing to grant before marriage. I have promis'd to submit to your Judgment, and therefore beg your answer by the next Mercury; whether two persons being just one to another, and designing really to marry when their circumstances will permit, may not lie together before marriage, without a Breach of Gods Law. Pray fail not to answer, &c.

Ans. As we have said before, we don't expect that any of these sort of Querists will have patience or honesty enough to stay for our answer, which we observe they are zealous, more than any others, to have precisely by the next Mercury, for a plain reason, least they should lose time and not make shaft enough to their Ruine. But we must confess amongst all our hasty querists of either Sex, we never yet met with any that came so home to the purpose, or spoke such plain English as this present: She is not it seems at all concern'd at the Infamy which has been justly laid on Concubinate without marriage, nor the particular Laws of her own Nation, nor the usages of the Church wherein she was born, the Excommunication she incurs, and the publick penance she ought to undergo, and if discipline be so broken that those things are now unusual or disregarded, we know whom we are to thank for't. If nothing of all this deserve a thought, one would think the Illegitimation of her children should have some little Influence on her mind: all that has been said already is certain and inevitable, but there are other Inconveniences which are next to certain, which it may be she may be more concern'd at than those already mention'd. Has she any security that her Spark will be true after all, and won't turn her to shift when he has ruffled her of all he cares for? Did she never know any Instances of such forsaken fools? Nay, how many can she give to the contrary? Is there any likelihood that the Honour of a person may be depended upon, who would break the Laws of his own and all other Nations; If women generally think their Lot is hard by reason of their Subjection to their Husbands, and that despotic power which they pretend to over them, how much harder must theirs be who depend for their Bread, on the Lust of any man, his absolute will and pleasure, and the Ebbs and Flows of his Fancy and Humour? Nay, may have their children as well as themselves turn'd-out of Doors every moment, without any help from those Laws which they despis'd? And can there be a more vehement suspicion of any thing than that this wonderfully virtuous Spark will never marry one, when he has already got all that many marry for, especially when he does little less than fairly confess his Intentions, by refusing to let her have any witness, so much as of the contract between 'em. Nay supposing he had a design of being just to her, would any person of Discretion give any other such a violent Temptation to be otherwise, as he must needs have when thus left to his own Liberty? For if variety have such Charms to Lewd and Wicked men, that even the most publick sacred vows and legal bands of marriage can not, oftentimes, keep 'em true to one person, how much less likely is't they should remain when nothing but their own private word obliges

'em? All this is said on supposition the man tempts the woman: But if the danger lies a t'other side as one would be almost ready to believe by reading the Query; and this forward Lady has such a mind to an Estate, and is in such haste to get it, that she'll throw off all the modesty of her Sex to obtain it, and for ever forfeit the esteem of all virtuous and pious persons, who she cannot but know, abhor the very thoughts of any such practices; let her at least and all others who may be in her circumstances, have some regard to the righteous Judgment of God, who has said, he'll Judge Whoremongers, and Adulterers, who requires the utmost purity of Life and Heart in Christians, on no less pains than those of Eternal Misery; and who has so strictly charg'd 'em in his holy word, not to deceive themselves, because neither Fornicators, nor Adulterers, nor unclean Persons, shall ever Inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.

Quest. 2. Tell your humble Servants, Pray Gentlemen, why the persons who did formerly Preach down Tobacco, and Periwigs, do now smoke Tobacco, and wear Wigs without any Scruple as well as their Neighbors?

Ans. Because those who once chiefly did so, and their whole party too, are now grown wiser. And 'tis very hard to forbid any from doing so.

Quest. 3. Suppose a Man has made conscience of all his ways through the whole course of his Life, and yet in sickness by reason of the Extremity thereof, is distracted, and dyes raving and blaspheming. What are we to Judge of this Man?

Ans. Doubtless we are to Judge Charitably, as God will mercifully, who will never punish an involuntary, which is not properly an humane action.

Quest. 4. Why our blessed Saviour loved St. John best, when St. Peter loved him most?

Ans. St. John appears to have lov'd the person of our Saviour better than St. Peter, whose Zeal for him seems to have been chiefly grounded on the mistaken Notion of his Countrymen, that he was to be a Temporal Messiah, to conquer Kingdoms, and make his Apostles his Vice-roys all the world over. Besides, St. John was a relation of our Saviours, and of a more agreeable temper than St. Peter who was hot and hasty, tho well meaning and honest.

Quest. 5. Pray the true Interpretation of that Text, St. Luk. 23. 31. "If they do these things in a Green Tree, what shall be done in the Dry?"

Ans. It seems to have been a proverbial speech among the Jews, or at least to allude to some such speech, and what the meaning of it is we shall more easily discover if we can find in what sense a Dry Tree, and Green are taken in Holy Scripture and the Jewish writings. Now Grotius and others tell us, that the Jews did commonly call Good Men, Ligna viridia, Green Trees, or Green Wood, as bad men, Dry, it being a Proverb trite enough amongst them. "If there be two pieces of Dry Wood together, and one of Green, the Dry will burn up the Green; whereby they either designed to warn men of ill company; or, as Grotius thinks, would signify that good men, as being generally the smaller number, are easily oppress'd by the Conspiracy of Evil. And that this Scheme of Speech was taken from common conversation and used in the sacred writings, will appear by several Texts in the Old Testament and New, as indeed how should our Saviour and the Prophets express themselves, but as their Countrymen used to do? One very clear place is in Ezek. 20. 47. Where God says. "I will kindle a Fire, and it shall devour every Green-Tree in thee, and every Dry Tree, which is explain'd in the 21. from 3. "I will cut off from thee the righteous and the wicked. And wicked men are frequently compar'd in the New Testament to dead and fruitless Trees and Branches, whose

whose end is to be burned. Thus the Baptist, St. Mat. 3. 10. "The axe is laid to the root of the Tree, every Tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the Fire. And to the same purpose our Saviour in the 18th of St. Mat. 19. From these observations apply'd to the context, we shall have no difficulty to come at the sense of the words.

In the verses before, our Saviour advis'd the women of Jerusalem, who wept when they saw him leading to his passion not to weep for him, but themselves and their children, because of the terrible Judgments which were coming upon them. "For if they do these things; if these things are done in the Green-Tree, what shall be done in the Dry? If I my self being just and innocent, am yet by the righteous dispensation of my Father, suffer these things from the Romans; what then must your wicked City and Nation expect to suffer from the same hands? If the righteous scarcely be saved, that is not without many Tribulations and Calamities, what will become of the Sinner and ungodly? and, as St. Peter says, If Judgment begin at the House of God, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel?

Quest. 6. If I can Communicate weekly without sin, is it not a sin for me not to Communicate?

Ans. We dare not affirm that, there being a great deal of difference between those two propositions, nor will the consequence always hold, nor is it easy to determine precisely in these matters. All we can say upon't is, "the frequenter the better, if with a devout and prepar'd mind; nay, we could never see any reason why habitual preparation should not be sufficient where there's no room for actual, or where a persons whole Life, or much the greater part thereof, is employ'd in acts of piety and religion, which must needs produce a constant and an awful sense of the divine presence, and such an habitual prevailing Love to God as was in the primitive Christians, who yet did by no means live idle, but follow'd their own employments, and took care of their own houses; those who neglected this, on any pretence whatsoever, being accounted by the Apostle even worse than Infidels. And yet we know these good men did communicate not only weekly, but daily, nor can we think that the frequency thereof made it cheaper, and less impressive upon their minds, which is the common but we think weak objection against frequent communion, that which brought the Papists to once a year, and some others to not above once, perhaps, in seven years; we see I say that such a slighting the Sacrament as is objected, is by no means a necessary consequence of such frequent receiving, the contrary appearing in the primitive Christians already mention'd, who may be thought to have ow'd much of their exemplary piety, constancy, and zeal to this very practice. And we are sure it has still much the same effects on some of those pious persons (all that we know of 'em) who are now so happy to communicate daily, who certainly can have no greater Bliss till they come to Heaven.

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